



Committee on Appropriations

Public Hearing February 17, 2017

Testimony of Mary Lou Aleskie

Good Afternoon Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the General Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

I am Mary Lou Aleskie, and I proudly serve as the Executive Director of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas, one of the world's premiere performing arts festivals. I am here to thank you for your past support of our work and to remind you of some very important facts regarding this festival and the State of Connecticut—facts that are reiterated in documents and further written testimony you will find in your materials.

-The Festival is an internationally recognized leader attracting talent and support worldwide. You will see written testimony from the global leadership organization, International Society for the Performing Arts CEO David Baile, referring to the Festival as a “valued and recognized international presenter.” Artists from 36 countries traveled to Connecticut to perform at the Festival over the last decade, each of them bring investment from cultural and trade offices in their home countries to pay for hotels, per diems, shipping and fees. A list of those agencies are attached to my testimony. This represents new money into the State of Connecticut.

-The Festival is a cultural tourism driver. Last year 104,000 attendees traveled from throughout the state and the region with 13% coming from outside of state. The Festival itself booked and paid for 766 hotel bed nights for artists alone.

-The Festival is a jobs creator. Testimony from the CEO of our printer, John Robinson of GHP Media, in West Haven expresses concern on behalf of himself and other small businesses and vendors who serve the Festival that further cuts to funding will reduce audiences and as a result demand for services. Testimony from International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees Local 74 speaks to the 155 of their 220 members who benefitted from work as well as health and welfare contributions for their employment at the Festival over the last three years. Last year the Festival paid 213 Festival staff members and presented 855 artists, 527 who are Connecticut residents.

-The Festival builds community. In the words of our own Mayor Toni N. Harp in her testimony asking for continued support for our work, the “festival raises a community's spirits even as it elevates the thoughts and aspirations of those who attend.”

In short, there are few organizations in our state who can say that right now, there are people all around the world applying for visas, packing shipping crates and gathering their resources to travel here to perform.

As winter winds down, the calls are beginning to come into our office about our season announcement event which is on March 28. The Festival opens in just 16 weeks. We have managed cut after cut in our state funding as well as the unpredictability of state payments. And yet we continue to deliver great financial and social benefits. But we have eroded the good will of our vendors who have been willing to ride out late payments and have no more resources to cushion unexpected shortfalls.

With all respect and gratitude, we ask that you continue to support of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas line item in the state budget and stand up for a great Connecticut asset that is contributing positively to our economic outlook and the overall attractiveness of our State as a place to visit, live and invest.